

The Pastor's Corner

Physical Training is Also Spiritual Training

Every Fall I participate in a retreat that is quite special for two reasons. First, because it is usually in the Rocky Mountains or Cascade Mountains. And second, it is only for men. One must be frank, the main reason that this retreat draws men is the mountains, not the religion. These mountains are very high, with one or two fourteeners, in other words, reaching over 14,000 feet, and we plan to conquer them. Since there are 52 such high peaks in the USA, there are a lot of retreats ahead of us. This year we are heading to Telluride in Colorado, a famous place for its ski resort. But it is also known for some extremely high peaks and the Via Ferrata or “Iron Path” – a trail with metal steps, chains, steel cables, iron rungs and a dangerous exposure (a steep or sheer drop below the trail).

This year, the group consists of 19 men, ages 40 to 55 and one or two priests. Our retreat is for Catholics, although there is always one who is either a fallen-away Catholic or an atheist. The Catholics are usually in various formation groups with wives and children engaged in programs as well. We do not start from the beginning but build on the years of spiritual formation. These are men of various professions: bankers, contractors, business owners, a teacher, a gynecologist, and two priests.

For the retreat, we rented a house in the mountains that serves as a base for hiking/climbing and a retreat activity. Participants are divided into several culinary and cleaning groups. Every group is responsible for one day of preparing breakfast and dinner after returning from hiking. Good news—no lunches at all. We start the day with prayer using psalms and celebration of the Mass. Hiking usually takes us nearly the whole day. In the evening, we gather for vespers—another psalm’s prayer of the Church—and for dining and conversations. During hiking, we usually say a rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet and have many, many discussions on different subjects from sports, politics and business to family, faith, and morality. Even though there are differences in opinions among us, the conversations are very valuable and educational. Working together in the kitchen, cleaning up after the meals and praying together puts us very close to each other and helps us to develop a real brotherhood. There is an understanding that we are members of the same Holy Church and sons of the same Father.



Hiking or climbing mountains is not the same as lying on the beach. It costs a lot. It requires physical work and is very exhausting. Gaining elevation is always painful. No pain, no gain. But there is one element that is important and even crucial in scaling mountains: it requires persistence and determination. Strenuous hiking is a natural preparation to face the joys and problems of ordinary life on the lowland, whether it is in the family, work, or societal life. Of course, these problems are different (from those) in the mountains, but they require the same resilient attitude. Days in the mountains help to develop persistence in pursuing goodness and resistance to bad things. Physical training is also spiritual training. It helps us not to ever give up in goodness or at least not to give up easily. At the same time, such a retreat opens people to the extraordinary beauty of the created world—the world that is presented to us in the beauty of the mountains. How can we not praise God for that gift?

I pray for you from the peaks of Telluride.

Fr. Mark Jurzyk

**Greetings from the mountains! —
Written by Fr. Mark during his retreat**